

Natural History Snippets

A Sri Lanka Natural History Society publication

Brief reports by members based on their observations of nature

The Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard *Otocryptis wiegmanni*

Images and story by Sri Srikumar



It is commonly seen in the leaf litter of shady rain forests which offers perfect camouflage for its long, thin body and brown, dried leaf-like, colour. The males are territorial and defend their territory against intruders initially through colourful displays which may lead on to fights. It uses its long hind legs to stand somewhat upright and run on the forest floor and maybe climb up a low branch or tree trunk to escape from danger. It feeds on small insects and their larvae, grubs, and tender shoots on the forest floor.

They may grow to an adult body size (measured snout-to-vent) of about 7 cm (2.8 in), with a long, slender tail of length 15 cm (5.9 in). Its colour ranges from dark reddish brown to dull brown. Males are darker than females and are easily identified by their bright colours when displaying to females, when threatened (Fig. 1) and also by the dark (maroon/black) patch on their gular sac.



Good luck at your next encounter with a Kangaroo Lizard in the forest. They are harmless creatures, being a part of the eco-balance of nature by consuming insects, so do not disturb or harm them; they too are an essential part of our lives.

- Sri Srikumar -
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The Kangaroo Lizard get its name from the upright two-legged stance it uses when running away to avoid danger. Its long hind legs enable it to move quite fast along the forest floor and when necessary to climb onto a low hanging branch or climb up a tree trunk.

The Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard, also called the brown-patched kangaroo lizard, or Wiegmann's agama is a small, ground-dwelling agamid lizard endemic to Sri Lanka. The specific name, *wiegmanni*, is in honour of German herpetologist Arend Friedrich August Wiegmann. It is closely related to the Indian kangaroo lizard (*O. beddomii*) of the rain forests of South India.

Its preferred habitats are the wet zone forests and the lower mountain forests of Sri Lanka.



Females lay about three to five eggs in a nest in the ground, usually between July and January, with a peak between October and January. The eggs are oval shaped, measuring about 17 mm (0.67in) in length. Hatchlings, in the form of baby lizards, emerge after 57 to 70 days.

They are a bit difficult to spot in the forest due to their small size, brown colour and by their habit of remaining motionless even when someone is close-by, running away only when threatened to merge again into the forest floor.

They can be seen by being very observant, especially in the damp areas under the lower vegetation in forests shaded by tall trees. They continue to be motionless when under observation or being photographed and only run away when they feel threatened.

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otocryptis_wiegmanni
And personal observations of the author.

The Agamidae or Dragon Lizards in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has 21 species of agamids, all of which are endemic to the island, except two (Table 1). Most of these lizards have a spiny crest behind the head that continues to the middle of their backs. There are 9 species of *Calotes* lizards in the country. The most common are the Common Garden Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*) called Gara Katussa in Sinhala and the Green Garden Lizard (*Calotes calotes*) called Pala Katussa in Sinhala, both being found elsewhere in Asia. The genera *Ceratophora*, *Cophotis* and *Lyriocephalus* are restricted to the Island.

(Anslem de Silva & Kanishka Ukuwela, 2017. *A Naturalist's Guide to the Reptiles of Sri Lanka*, Vijitha Yapa Publishing: 27-44, 168)

IUCN Threat Status Categories

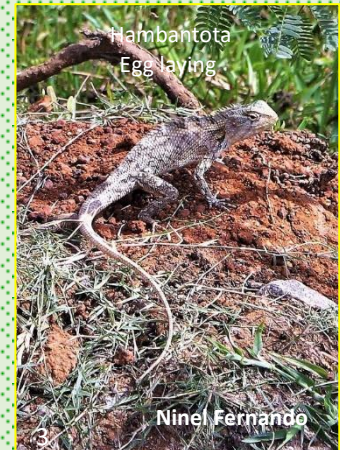
CR Critically Endangered
EN Endangered
VU Vulnerable
NT Near Threatened
LC Least Concern
DD Data Deficient
(NE = Not Evaluated)

Table 1

<i>Calotes calotes</i>	Green garden lizard	LC
<i>Calotes ceylonensis</i> *	Painted lip lizard	NT
<i>Calotes desilvae</i> *	Desilva's whistling lizard	CR
<i>Calotes liocephalus</i> *	Crestless lizard	CR
<i>Calotes liolepis</i> *	Sri Lanka whistling lizard	NT
<i>Calotes manamendrai</i> *	Manamendra's whistling lizard	NE
<i>Calotes nigrilabris</i> *	Black cheeked lizard	EN
<i>Calotes pethiyagodai</i> *	Pethiyagoda's crestless lizard	EN
<i>Calotes versicolor</i>	Common garden lizard	LC
<i>Ceratophora aspera</i> *	Rough horned lizard	EN
<i>Ceratophora erdeleni</i> *	Erdelen's horned lizard	CR
<i>Ceratophora karu</i> *	Karunaratne's horned lizard	CR
<i>Ceratophora stoddartii</i> *	Rhinohorn lizard	EN
<i>Ceratophora tennentii</i> *	Leaf nosed lizard	CR
<i>Cophotis ceylanica</i> *	Pygmy lizard	EN
<i>Cophotis dumbara</i> *	Knuckles pygmy lizard	CR
<i>Lyriocephalus scutatus</i> *	Lyre head lizard	VU
<i>Otocryptis nigristigma</i> *	Black spotted kangaroo lizard	LC
<i>Otocryptis wiegmanni</i> *	Sri Lanka kangaroo lizard	LC
<i>Sitana bahiri</i> *	Bahir's fan-throat lizard	NE
<i>Sitana devakai</i> *	Devaka's fan-throat lizard	NE

* Denotes an endemic species.

A GALLERY OF SOME OF THE OTHER AGAMIDS Photographed by Ninel Fernando and Sri Srikumar



Figures 1 - 4. *Calotes calotes* Green garden lizard
Despite the name they are not always green. Figs 1 & 4 are males, the black fold or pit in front of the shoulder (Fig. 4) is characteristic.

Figures 5 - 7. *Calotes versicolor* Common Garden lizard
Colouration variable, and changeable, the head becoming bright red in displaying males (Fig. 5). Figs 6 & 7 are of a juvenile.





Figures 8 - 9. *Calotes versicolor*
Common Garden lizard
Male (Fig. 8). Common colouration (Fig. 9).



Figures 12 - 13. *Lyriocephalus scutatus*
Lyre head lizard
Colour changeable from dark to light green, especially in males.



Figures 10 - 11. *Ceratophora tennentii*
Leaf-nose lizard
Riveston
Body colour variable -
greenish to greenish-
brown.



Figure 14. *Calotes nigrilabris*
Black-cheek lizard
A male, showing the characteristic black band on
the lips. Generally light green.



Figures 15 - 16. *Ceratophora stodartii*
Rhino horn lizard
Dull greenish-brown, the rostral appendage ('horn') is smaller in
the female. Fig. 16 is probably a female.

The brief notes about these lizards have
been obtained from de Silva & Ukuwela
2017, *A Naturalist's Guide to the Reptiles
of Sri Lanka*, Vijitha Yapa Publications.



Figures 17 - 18. *Calotes versicolor*
Common garden lizard
Both photographed at Wilpattu. Fig. 17 is probably a female.



Figures 19 - 20. *Calotes calotes*
Green garden lizard
Fig. 19 photographed at Anavilundawa, Fig. 20 at Yala.



Figures 21 - 22. *Lyriocephalus scutatus*
Lyre head lizard
Fig. 21 photographed at Kanneliya. Fig. 22 at Athweltota.

